



<http://chennai.usconsulate.gov>

-David T. Hopper, Consul General

mer the candidates for President and Vice President are on the ballot.

This year in the morning of November 8, which was the evening of Election Day in the United States, more than a hundred Indian guests (mostly students of political science, professors, and journalists) joined the staff of the U.S. Consulate General to view and discuss the election returns. The Consulate had live feeds of CNN and Voice of America displayed on wide screens. In addition, the participants were able to hear and see a live digital video conference between Washington and New Delhi in which a young activist provided a South Asian immigrant community perspective on the U.S. election.

Many of the Indian guests were fascinated to see an actual American ballot which had been provided by a Consulate employee. (See photo on page 1) This particular ballot from Seattle, Washington, which was not unlike thousands of other ballots across the nation, allowed the voter not only to register his or her preference for U.S. Senator and U.S. Representative, but also for state and city legislators, county prosecuting attorney, and judges at several different levels.

The Seattle ballot also contained many examples of direct democracy in which the voters in effect bypass their representatives. One mechanism is the initiative whereby citizens collect enough signatures on petitions to put a law directly on the ballot, e.g., to repeal Washington State's estate tax. Another mechanism is the referendum which is some-

(Continued on page 3)

CHENNAI CONSULATE STAFF CELEBRATES DEEPAVALI AND EID-UL-FITR

On October 27, 2006, the local employee association celebrated Deepavali and Eid-ul-Fitr at the Consulate. The day-long celebration included a Rangoli floral decoration competition, briyani lunch and a cultural program. In the floral decoration competition, judges Mrs. Susan Hopper and Mrs. Wanpen Ordonez picked the Public Affairs Section as winner and United States Education Foundation in India as runner-up. Later in the evening the cultural program started with an invocation by Jayasree and a reading from the Quran by matullah. A sic program by wathi, accom-



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panied by
her father
Jagadish,
Director of
the Ameri-

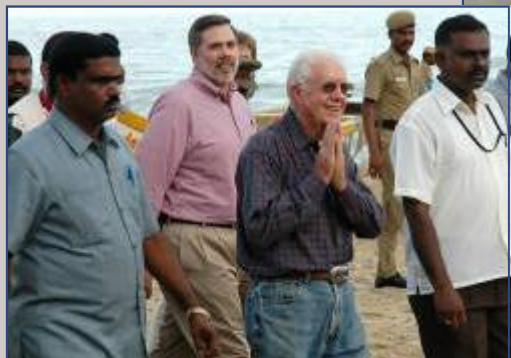


can Library, on mridangam was a feast for the ears (see Positive Images). The staff had the privilege of witnessing a special show by Master Siddharth, a child prodigy and the POGO "Amazing Kid" award-winner, on the drums. Ms. Shambhavi, daughter of Mr. Jagadish, charmed the audience with her graceful Bharatanatyam performance.

Positive Images



Members of Harlem Globetrotters chatting with Indian sailing champion Ms. Rohini Rau. Also seen is her mother Ms. Aysha Rau..



Former President Jimmy Carter greeting the villagers of tsunami-affected Annumanthai kuppam. Also seen is Consul General David Hopper.



American Library Director M.K. Jagadish accompanying his daughter Ms. Shashwathi during Consulate's Deepavali-Id celebrations.

times required when, for example, a state, county, or city wishes to raise money by issuing bonds. All told, the Seattle voter, aided by a 120-page voters' pamphlet, had 45 decisions to make on the ballot.

Some of the Indian guests admired the extent to which Americans were permitted to participate in governing themselves directly. They liked having judges accountable to voters. Others, however, disapproved of the lengthy ballot and wondered how even an educated electorate could make informed decisions on so many complicated issues and about judges they were unlikely to have encountered. Moreover, they asked, how could one read and fill out the ballot in less than half an hour? (In part because of the complexity of voting, most of Washington State's counties now conduct elections entirely by mail; i.e., there are no polls.)

The debate in the U.S. Consulate General-Chennai did not settle the question of how direct or representative an electoral system should be, or whether judges should be answerable to the people or only to their oath of office. About all that everyone could agree on was that there was no such thing as a perfect, one-size-fits-all democracy. Forms of government evolve constantly, and elections, like the one witnessed, allow them to do so in a peaceful and orderly manner.

Kudos

U.S. Consulate General Chennai congratulates Ms. Geetha Ganapathy, the Consulate's Distribution Records System Manager, for being one of the top ten finalists in Google Wordmasters 2006, a creative writing contest designed by Google Inc. to identify and celebrate India's top English-writing talent.



The participants were given a randomly generated list of words and were asked to use them to create a logical and grammatically correct written piece on a topic of choice within 45 minutes. The contest was held on September 30 in ten cities across India and drew an enthusiastic response with 3000 participants nationwide.

Geetha has worked with the U.S. Consulate for 23 years, and we are all proud of her outstanding achievement.

Consular Corner:

Visa Fee Reduced

During the past two months, the Consulate has implemented several new measures in non-immigrant visa processing that have lowered visa fees and sharply reduced the wait for visa appointments, especially for applicants who need an interview in Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil or Telugu.

On November 8, the non-immigrant visa issuance fee for all Indian applicants was eliminated. The visa application fee (Rs.4,600 as of November 13) remains in place, however, along with some other processing fees. For a full listing of specific fee changes and more information on all U.S. visa and consular services, please visit the Consulate website at <http://chennai.usconsulate.gov>.

On October 5, U.S. Ambassador David C. Mulford announced that the U.S. Mission had made a commitment to reduce the waiting time for visa appointments across India. The goal is to eliminate this waiting period entirely in order to further facilitate the travel of Indians to the U.S., whether for tourism, business or studies.

Expanded capacity, close cooperation with Visa Facilitation Services (VFS), and newly streamlined procedures currently allow processing of 1,500-1,700 cases a day in Chennai. Visa appointments have been generally available within two weeks and will continue to be available within two weeks or less after the Christmas and New Year's holidays.

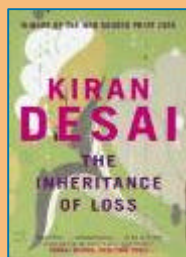
As Ambassador Mulford noted, referring to these new procedures:

"Nothing is more important for the future of our two countries than the strong and growing bond of business and people-to-people contact. Strengthening these connections is the future of U.S.-Indian relations, and we have begun this today."

"Outside of a dog, a man's best friend is a book. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read." (Groucho Marx)

Jessica E. Norris
Vice Consul

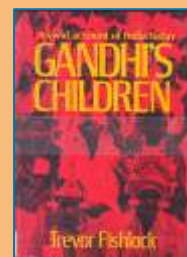
Inheritance of Loss
by Kiran Desai



I love how this book's vividly detailed and colorful language took me deep into the Himalayas, where a small town struggled with the growing Indian-Nepali insurgency. Through the lens of the town's residents, the book tackles global issues such as immigration, identity politics, the legacy of colonization and social inequality. Because of the author's talent for seamlessly weaving lives and stories across time and the globe, I felt emotionally connected with each of the dynamic characters and their struggles to find a place for themselves in uncertain times. This is a perfect book to pair with a steaming cup of tea and a rainy weekend afternoon as you will want to read it cover to cover.

Frederick J. Kaplan
Consul for Public Affairs

Gandhi's Children
by Trevor Fishlock



What do foreign correspondents do with their left-over notebooks when they get a new assignment? Write a book. Fishlock's account of India in the early 1980s is a decidedly British perspective on a country he found to be at once "stimulating, absorbing, daunting, sometimes moving and shocking." He describes in some detail the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty at a time when Indira was reigning and Rajiv being groomed. One learns that Neville Chamberlain, long before he was snookered by Hitler, had a role in inventing and, more important, naming the game of snooker while passing the time with his fellow British officers in Ooty. Chamberlain should have quit when he was ahead.

Harlem Globetrotters Visit South India

The famous Harlem Globetrotters made their first full-fledged tour in India from November 13 to 23, thrilling stadium crowds in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Kochi. Their “sportainment show” combined an actual game against their companion team, the New York Nationals, with dazzling basketball tricks and comedy routines. The Indian audiences loved it.

The players are also sports ambassadors and seemed never to tire of meeting Indians of all ages and sharing their sense of fun. At a brunch hosted by Consul General David Hopper, the Globetrotters interacted with Indian athletes, entertainers, journalists, business leaders, and diplomats.

The Globetrotter charm was especially evident, however, in their visits to schools and when the players mixed with children. At the American International School Chennai (AISC) gym, the Globetrotters gave basketball lessons to the high school varsity team and the school’s principal in front of some 500 students, teachers, and parents.

The team, now celebrating its 80th year in existence, plays to two million spectators annually. The Harlem Globetrotters have visited 117 countries and are still adding to the list. Under the leadership of current owner Mannie Jackson, himself a former Globetrotter, the organization is committed to giving back to communities that have supported the team and have donated over \$11 million to various charities worldwide.



Seven-year-old Erika Somani being taught by a Globetrotter how to spin a basketball on her finger

If you missed the Globetrotters this time, you might get another chance. They all said they wanted to come back to India, and they have challenged current Olympic basketball champions Argentina to a winner-take-all game anywhere in the world. If Indian basketball fans get lucky, the game could happen here.

International Education Week

In the week of November 13-17, U.S. Consulate General staff undertook a number of activities to mark International Education Week – e.g., addressing secondary students in Chennai, participating in a national seminar of English teachers in Tuticorin.

Indians are eminently aware of the importance of international education and in particular of the high-quality education offered by American institutions of higher learning. More than 24,000 U.S. visas were issued to Indian students in the year that ended on September 30, and for the last five years India has been the leading country of origin for international students studying at U.S. universities.



West Bound: Students going to United States interacting with U.S. graduates in Chennai. Photo Credit : K.V. Srinivasan, The Hindu.

Meanwhile, top-flight U.S. schools like Davidson College of North Carolina regularly send students to India for a semester abroad, during which they learn Tamil or Hindi, among other subjects. Study abroad enriches the lives of the students and benefits both the sending and receiving countries.

Speaking at the Sri Ramachandra Medical College and Research Institute, U.S. Consul General David Hopper explained the significance of the International Education week celebration: “There is no greater influence on international understanding – and through it peace and progress – than people of different countries and cultures coming together and meeting each other. And while tourism is good and work opportunities even better, no overseas experience is more powerful or more meaningful than education.” Mr. Hopper’s message to Indian students planning to study in America was a simple one: “Welcome!”

The name of the American Information Resource Center (AIRC) has been changed to **The American Library**. We believe the word library is more descriptive and more familiar to our patrons. We would like all of you to think of **The American Library** as Your American Library.